

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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FOUR DOLLARS





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HUNTING & FISHING LICENSE FEES

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Bob Duncan
Executive Director



This month I celebrate my one-year anniversary in leading this organization. I wish to assure you that our agency is standing firmly on its feet and I am so very grateful to a cadre of long-serving, dedicated employees who have kept us operating on solid ground during some turbulent times.

At the same time, we—like all wildlife management agencies across the country—face unprecedented challenges from a changing landscape, from shifts in settlement patterns across the state, and from evolving lifestyles that reflect, in general, less time spent in forests, fields, and streams.

And as you are undoubtedly aware, all government institutions are facing shortfalls due to the downturn in the economy. A dramatic drop-off in watercraft sales and use tax transfers is but one tangible example affecting our bottom line.

For these reasons and many others, we have enlisted the help of an outside team to closely examine how we function as an agency. A small group of experts from North Highland and the Titan Group has been chin-deep in a management study over the past several months. Specifically, they are looking at four strands of our structure and governance: our business processes; our financial modeling; our organiza-

tional make-up; and development of a strategic look forward. North Highland has performed similar studies for other state agencies to help them improve efficiencies while charting a focused course toward the future.

Their evaluation of this Department will include both current modes of operation as well as business opportunities for the decade ahead. Included will be such things as estimating future capital needs and determining where and to what extent revenue gaps may exist. Naturally, that will lead to close examination of how to create new revenue streams in today's marketplace. Also offered in their report will be recommendations for long-term strategies to improve our day-to-day business processes, to eliminate waste and duplication, and accordingly, to reduce costs.

While this sort of undertaking is never easy or comfortable (change never is!), I believe the timing of this study is superb. We find ourselves at a critical juncture as an agency, and we will benefit greatly from the shared perspective of trained, outside experts looking in.

The outcomes will be many, but the bottom line is this: We will better serve you, our constituents, and position the Department to better meet the many resource challenges ahead.

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Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to serve the needs of the Commonwealth; To provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish, boating and related outdoor recreation and to work diligently to safeguard the rights of the people to hunt, fish and harvest game as provided for in the Constitution of Virginia; To promote safety for persons and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing; To provide educational outreach programs and materials that foster an awareness of and appreciation for Virginia's fish and wildlife resources, their habitats, and hunting, fishing, and boating opportunities.

Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

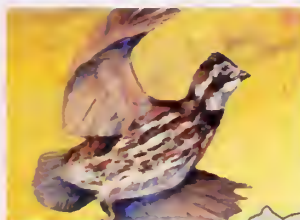
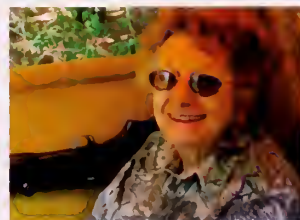
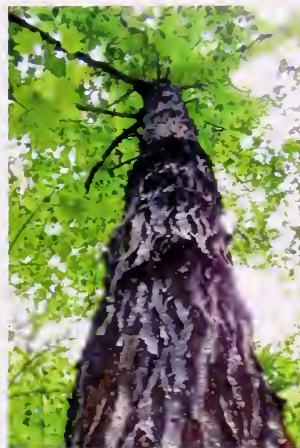


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About the cover: Reaching barely 10 inches in length, the quail is a chunky upland bird with a fanciful "bob-white" call and a loyal following among bird lovers and hunters. Quail are most often pursued on private hunting preserves, still

plentiful across Virginia. See related story on page 17. © John R. Ford



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Pursuing an Ame

*Restoring the
American chestnut to
our forests — and our
wildlife.*

by Virginia Shepherd

In the mountains of Nelson County, Dr. Gary Griffin jumps out of his white Chevy van and whistles for his dog. "Let's go, Timber." A 14-year-old English setter, Timber is the second-best grouse dog Griffin has ever owned. "He still has at least one season left in him, I think," grins the optimistic Griffin, a lean and athletic figure in his late 60s. A member of The Loyal Order of Dedicated Grouse Hunters, Griffin sets a goal of spending 120 hours hunting grouse every year. That translates into a lot of forest he and Timber have covered together in Virginia and West Virginia. But when Griffin is in the woods, he's not only grouse hunting. He's hunting chestnuts. For more than 40 years, Griffin, a plant pathologist and professor emeritus at Virginia Tech, and wife Lucille have joined a handful of researchers on a quest to restore our blighted past and bring the American chestnut back to Virginia forests.

One hundred years ago, the American chestnut, *Castanea dentata*, made up nearly one-quarter of the tree species in our woods, forming the very foundation of the southern Appalachians' forests. Reaching heights of more than 65 feet and 4-5 feet in diameter, the hardy and aggressive American chestnut was the undisputed monarch of the forest. A tree of true abundance, it was a preferred food of wild turkey, deer, bear, grouse, and squirrels, and one of the most important sources of income for mountain farmers who fattened their hogs on chestnuts and earned cash

Philadelphia's Fairmount Park was the scene for Gathering Chestnuts, by J.W. Lauderbach. This engraving appeared in the Art Journal of 1878.

American Dream



Dr. Gary Griffin with his English setter, Timber.



The family of James and Caroline Shelton pose by a large, dead chestnut tree in Tremont Falls, Tenn., circa 1920. The tree was found to be hollow.



A lone chestnut snag stands in Big Meadows in Shenandoah National Park, Virginia. **Right:** Illustration by Susan Bull Riley. (Courtesy of The American Chestnut Foundation.)

by supplying the nut trade. Virginia was the very center of its kingdom, with chestnut forests spreading north and south through the Appalachians from New Hampshire to Georgia.

Yet a microscopic fungus invisible to the naked eye brought this giant of the forest to its knees. In 1904, *Cryphonectria parasitica*, the Asian fungus responsible for the chestnut blight, was first identified in New York in a stand of dying American chestnut trees. By 1914, the blight had reached Northern Virginia. By 1925, it was blazing through the Blue Ridge into North Carolina, killing virtually every overstory chestnut tree in its wake and spreading south and west at a rate of 24 miles per year. In a short 40 years, the tiny fungus killed between three and four billion trees and completely dismantled the forest landscape in more than 33 million acres of the southern Appalachians.

The devastation was nothing less than catastrophic, and frightening to those who realized there was nothing they could do to stop it. Susan Freinkel, in her must-read book, *The American Chestnut: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of a Perfect Tree*, interviewed Joe Tribble, an eastern Kentucky native who remembers the death of the chestnut forests, "Man, I had the awfullest feeling about that as a child, to look back yonder and see those trees dying. I thought the whole world was going to die." (p. 84)

Fortunately it didn't. The healthy oak-hickory-maple complex of the hardwood forests we know today gradually replaced the great chestnut forests in Virginia. Abundance returned, and deer, turkey, bear, and squirrel flourish again in our forests. Nevertheless, with the loss of the mighty chestnut, we lost nearly a third of our forests' produc-



tivity, translating into vital winter food for wildlife. The cyclical acorn failures we experience today signal starvation years for wildlife which were unknown in chestnut forests. Because the chestnut flowers in June, no late frost ever spoiled its reliable and abundant harvest of carbohydrate-rich nuts which could support high populations of wildlife through the harshest of winters.

These facts have not been lost on those who value wildlife. The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTf) is supporting the efforts of those dedicated to restoring the American chestnut to our landscape. "We want to be part of the restoration plans," said Robert Abernathy, Director of Agency Programs for the NWTf. Backing restoration efforts with money and cooperative agreements, NWTf hopes to involve its members in on-the-ground chestnut forest restoration work in the future. "It's a segment of our natural history that's been missing for a long time," said Abernathy, "and all wildlife will benefit from its return."

Nevertheless, restoring the kingpin of our forests has proved a hard nut to crack. The microscopic fungus blown on a breeze has proved a worthy opponent to the toughest and greatest of our trees and the best and brightest of its supporters for nearly a century. Today, the blight is firmly established in the southern Appalachians, and any American chestnut sprout opportunistically pushing its stem through the soil in the spring is guaranteed to fall victim to it within 10 years or less. Fortunately, howev-



Above: The anatomy of an American chestnut tree. Illustration by Bruce Lyndon Cunningham, 2001. (Courtesy of The American Chestnut Foundation.)

Left: American chestnut bur in winter, photo by Kathy Marmet.



er, the fungus does not kill by attacking a tree's root system. Instead, it attacks the bark, killing all living tissue above the infection. As a result, though felled by the blight or nipped off by a passing deer, chestnut seedlings continue to exist in our forests, persistently sprouting again and again for many years.

Unlike the Chinese chestnut,

Castanea mollissima, which has co-existed with the blight for thousands of years, the American chestnut has not yet developed effective blight resistance. Some large surviving American chestnut trees do, however, possess a heightened degree of resistance. But the toll it takes to battle the blight makes them more susceptible to drought, deer damage, or a host of



Dr. Griffin with wife Lucille, who directs the American Chestnut Cooperators' Foundation.

other difficulties naturally present in the forest environment.

Thus, some researchers have devoted their efforts to enlisting the Chinese chestnut to help the American chestnut shore up its defenses. Their idea is to perfect an American-Chinese chestnut cross through a sophisticated backcross breeding program, which will preserve most of the prized characteristics of the pure American chestnut while adding the essential strong blight resistance trait of a Chinese tree. Backcross programs of this sort have been perfected with agricultural crops such as corn. But any type of tree breeding program is slow going and slow growing. Each successive generation of chestnut crosses must be raised to maturity (some 5-6 years under the best of conditions), tested for blight-resistance, and then paired again to produce nuts to begin another 5 to 6-year cycle.

The American Chestnut Foundation (TACF) was formed one-quarter of a century ago by a determined group of scientists and chestnut lovers dedicated to pursuing this slow but effective hybridization program at their research sites in southwest Virginia. Today, they are growing over 34,000 trees of a blight-resistant variety which is but 1/16th Chinese chestnut and 15/16ths American chestnut.

But even though a blight-resistant chestnut seedling is planted in the woods, it does not mean that it will grow. The forest is full of its own complexities, something Gary Griffin knows well from his thousands of logged hours grouse hunting, cou-



Middle left: Virulent canker on young American chestnut tree. Inset: close-up of orange pimple-like structures which are the stromata of *Cryphonectria parasitica*. (Courtesy of The American Chestnut Foundation.)

Middle right: Blight damage is evident, but because the fungus does not attack a tree's root system, this chestnut will continue to survive, sprouting again and again for many years.

Left: Griffin and his colleagues have discovered that a two-time inoculation of young trees with a naturally occurring, but weakened "hypovirulent" strain of the blight fungus fortifies the tree's resistance.

pled with his 40 years of research with purebred American chestnuts in their natural forest environment. Every week, Dr. Griffin and his wife, Lucille, and Timber make the three-hour drive from their home in Blacksburg to a three-acre clearcut site in the middle of the 422-acre Lesesne State Forest in Nelson County, land donated to the state more than 40 years ago specifically for chestnut research. In the '80s, the Griffins and a small group of like-minded researchers formed the American Chestnut Co-operators' Foundation (ACCF), dedicated to the restoration of what Lucille calls the "All-American chestnut."

ACCF's mission is to build up

location of large surviving chestnuts in the forest to strengthen the program's blight-resistant genetic pool, and the identification of forest habitat well-suited to chestnut growth. Griffin has found that grouse hunting helps fulfill that mission. "Sooner or later hunters who spend a lot of time in the woods will come across a large chestnut survivor. One of the best trees in our breeding program I found while grouse hunting in Floyd County," he says. Griffin carries a compass in his pocket—not to find his way home, but to add to the critical data he gathers when he locates a primo chestnut site.

"Basically, when I'm grouse hunting, I'm doing a forest transect as

ant chestnut seedlings. Griffin explains that "blight resistance" is a relative term. Chestnuts do not conquer the blight; instead, they must be tough enough to live with it. Through his research, Griffin has identified what promising seedlings need to carry on the fight and survive into mature, reproducing trees in a forest environment, including adequate protection from deer, bear, and vole damage in their early years. Griffin and his colleagues have also discovered that fortifying blight resistance in pure American chestnuts means enlisting the presence of a weakened "hypovirulent" strain of the blight fungus, which they have found existing naturally in mature



Researchers with the National Wild Turkey Federation and The American Chestnut Foundation (with president of Va. Chapter, George Thampson, right) cooperate in many areas of study.



A healthy American chestnut tree in Tennessee. Pallen from this tree has been used in The American Chestnut Foundation's breeding program.

the naturally low blight resistance in pure American chestnuts through its cross-breeding program with large surviving trees, while simultaneously funding research to better understand the dynamics between the American chestnut, the blight, and the forest ecology in which they both exist. "It is an integrated management approach," explains Griffin, whose research philosophy was influenced by his work as an undergraduate in wildlife management at the University of Alaska. "The wildlife management connection is important to me."

Key to the ACCF's strategy is the

well," he said. "I spend 90% of the time grouse hunting and 10% looking for chestnuts." Griffin once found a premier restoration site as well while hunting—a clearcut with old chestnut stumps of a diameter and in a density that wowed even this veteran chestnut researcher. He returned to the site, gained permission to establish seedlings there, and now says, "They're growing like gangbusters. It's a terrific site."

Griffin has found that aspect, slope, direction, and the quality and composition of the forest habitat are key elements to ensuring the survival of even the strongest of blight-resist-

survivors. Their studies reveal that a two-time inoculation of young trees with this weakened strain improves their survival dramatically.

As executive director of ACCF, Lucille oversees their breeding program, including horticulture and grafting procedures perfected by J.R. Elkins in cooperation with now-retired VDOF research forester Tom Dierauf. Lucille sends out blight-resistant nuts to 850 cooperating landowners to plant each fall, and compiles follow-up reports on seedling survival. "What we have is a huge outdoor laboratory where we're learning as we go how to raise

chestnuts in the wild environment," says Lucille. "Basically what I've learned so far from doing this is that it's a very difficult job."

Half a mile down the road from the Griffins' ACCF research site, Virginia state foresters Wayne Bowman, John Scrivani, and Jerre Creighton are 30 feet high in the lift of a Department of Forestry "bucket truck," swaying in the treetops of Lesesne's 40-year-old hybrid American chestnut plantation. Reaching into a tree's canopy for a single dark green, glossy-leaved limb, Bowman locates the tiny green nub resembling a Thumbelina-sized artichoke at the base of each leaf. Because chestnut trees are not self-pollinating as a rule,

mighty American chestnut to remain one of the great ecological tragedies of our time are a tenacious lot. Like the chestnut seedlings persistently sprouting each spring against all odds, they have refused to give up the fight. Now, finally, a harvest of sorts may be near.

Over the past 20 years, ACCF has sent out 140,000 open-pollinated seedlings and nuts to their cooperators. VDOF has planted 600 hybrid chestnut seedlings in forests throughout the state; their nurseries hold 8,000 seedlings, and thousands of nuts have been planted in their nurseries since the 1960s. In 2008, the 6,000-member strong TACF announced the monumental achievement of their hybrid backcross breeding goals. They will soon begin reforestation trials on national forest sites with blight-resistant, 94% pure American chestnut seedlings. George Thompson, president of the Virginia Chapter of TACF, whose late father was a DGIF board member for whom the G. Richard Thompson WMA in Fauquier County is named, is justly optimistic. "In 25 years, TACF has shown that the American chestnut can be saved, and within the next 25 years Virginia will see the reintroduction of this wonderful tree into our forests."

Still, whether or not we will ever be able to walk again through a chestnut forest in the Appalachians remains a vision of epic proportion. It continues to beckon the best and the brightest and the most tenacious lovers of wildlife and one mighty tree. □

Virginia Shepherd is a former editor of Virginia Wildlife magazine. She has been a freelance writer for the past 12 years.

Books:

American Chestnut: The Life, Death, and Rebirth of a Perfect Tree, by Susan Freinkel Published by the University of California Press, 2007.

Mighty Giants, An American Chestnut Anthology, edited by Chris Bolgiano and Glenn Novak. Published by The American Chestnut Foundation, 2007. (available from www.vatacf.org)



Blighted American chestnut with chickadees and lichen. Illustration by Susan Bull Riley. (Courtesy of The American Chestnut Foundation.)

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Photo by Joe Schibig

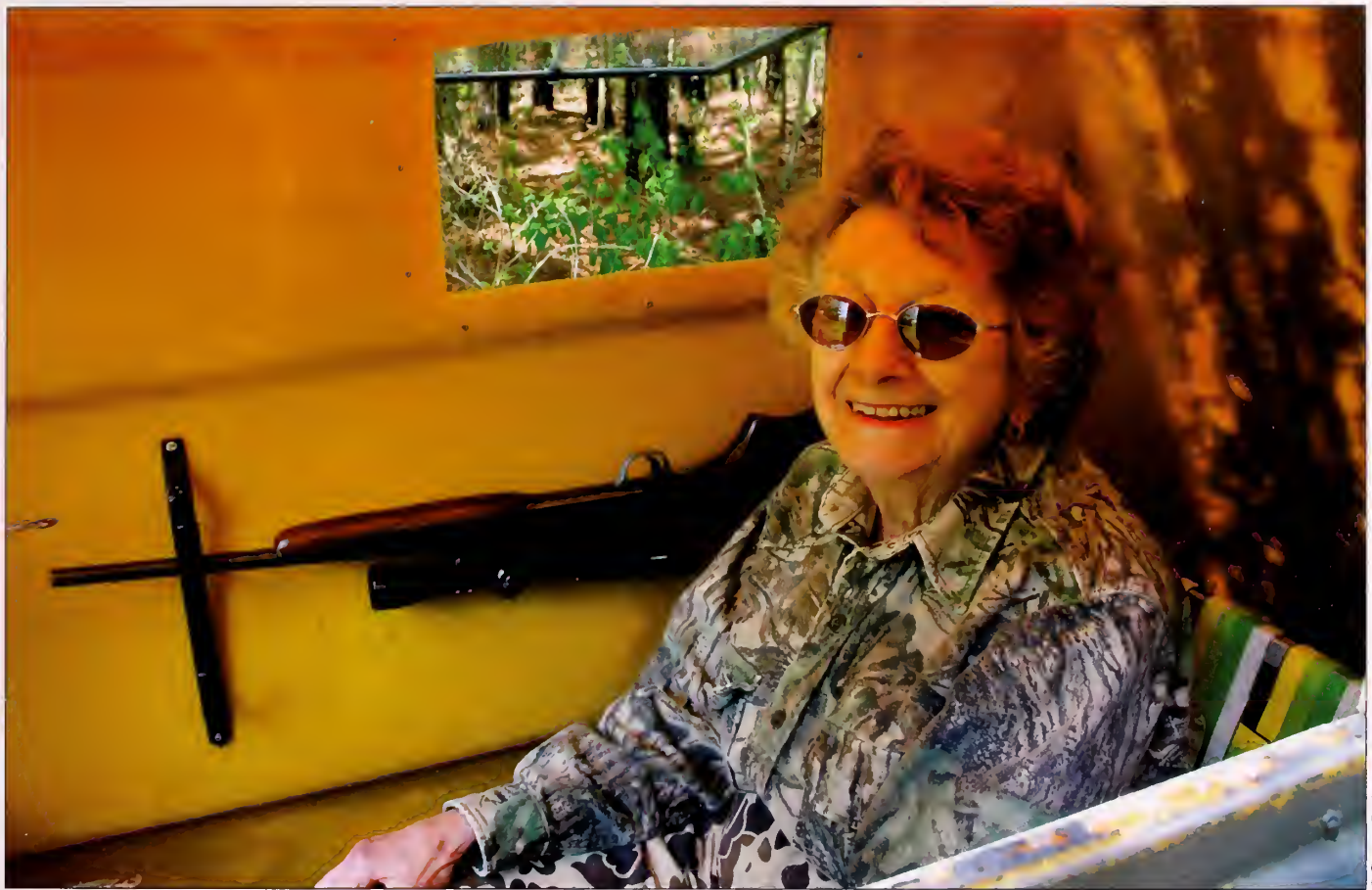
American chestnut in full blossom. (Courtesy of The American Chestnut Foundation.)

it is possible to control breeding crosses through hand pollination. Bowman gently waves a 3-inch stem of fluffy pollen over each flower before slipping a small white paper bag over the blossom cluster and wrapping it tight. Two months from now, the bags will come off and the prickly burrs protecting the cluster pop open to reveal three nuts inside. Carefully packed in peat moss and refrigerated over the winter, each nut that VDOF plants in the spring represents a small, shiny, tough little bundle of hope.

There is no doubt that those who have refused to allow the loss of the

It's Never Too Late





©Curtis Badger

by Curtis Badger

*Tired of staying at
home while everyone
went hunting,
Violet Mears decided
to take up the sport
at age 75.*

Violet Mears got the perfect Mother's Day present last May. It was a lightweight, pop-up, camouflage deer stand courtesy of her son, Lennie. Earlier, Violet's husband, O.W., had given her a new scope for the .30/.30. By the time her next birthday rolls around, she should be well equipped for the fall season.

Violet's next birthday will be her 79th, and the remarkable thing is not just that she remains an enthusiastic deer hunter on the cusp of her ninth decade, but she is a relative novice at the sport. At age 75, Violet decided that deer hunting was not intended for men only, so she completed a hunter safety class, got her license, and shortly thereafter bagged her first deer. Since then, she has taken a deer each season, including a nice buck in 2006.

"All the men in my family hunt, and I got sick and tired of sitting in the house while they were out, cook-

ing supper for everybody," she says. "So I told them, 'you stay home and I'll go.'"

Violet's decision to take up deer hunting was warmly embraced by the men of the Mears family. They live on a farm near the town of Parkesley on Virginia's Eastern Shore, and going deer hunting is literally a matter of walking out the back door and going to the deer stand. Although Violet has hunted in numerous locations since taking up the sport, her favorite spot is the family farm, in the field behind the old chicken house, adjacent to the cutover pine woods. It was here that she bagged her first deer, an accomplishment duly recorded in the family scrapbook.

The Mears' land is a working farm, but it is better known among local people as the home of the Barn-



©Curtis Badger

Violet in front of her deer stand, built by husband O.W. from an industrial trash receptacle.



Violet and O.W. Mears, shown here in front of a former chicken house which served for many years as the site of their barnyard auction business.

yard Auction, a business operated for many years by O.W. and Violet until they decided to retire in 2000. The auctions became a Friday evening staple on the Eastern Shore: a combination of entertainment and antiques roadshow, where visitors might take a number and bid on everything from garden tools to handmade antique furniture. In addition to the auction, there were hamburgers, hot dogs, and Violet's famous homemade cakes.

The auctions were held in one of the former chicken houses on the farm—a low slung, narrow building about 100 yards long. O.W. built a moveable platform mounted on rails, where he presided as auctioneer. The auction would begin at the east end of the chicken house, with sale items displayed on either side of the platform, and as the auction progressed the platform would slowly make its way west down the center of the building. At the end of the evening the platform would have reached the end of the line, and the sale was adjourned.

The auction building now is something of a warehouse for the Mears family, storing, among other things, the variety of deer stands

O.W. has made for Violet. O.W., who is 83, is still an enthusiastic hunter, but he also has a talent for making deer stands from objects that never were intended for that use.

For example, Violet made her first kill from an inverted plastic container originally intended as an industrial trash receptacle. O.W. bought the box, which measures about three by five feet, turned it over and mounted it on skids, cut out openings for windows, painted it drab, and mounted a gun rack inside. Violet now has a snug, weatherproof blind that has provided hours of comfortable hunting.

Another stand was made from the salvaged wire safety cage of a Bobcat loader. O.W. bought the cage at auction for a song, inverted it, mounted it on skids, built a plywood roof, added canvas side curtains, and created another portable blind that could be towed to any location on the farm.

O.W. has been very supportive of his wife's new-found love of hunting. He not only has built numerous stands, but he usually provides transportation to and from the hunting area on the red ATV parked in the garage. He'll drop Violet off around 4

p.m. and pick her up at dark. She hunted sixteen days last season.

While O.W. gave Violet a few pointers when she began hunting, he rarely accompanies her in the deer stand. "He went with me a few times when I first started and told me what to do," says Violet, "but eventually I told him to stay home. He talks too much."

Violet's weapon of choice is the single shot .30/.30 they gave to their son, Lennie, when he was eight years old and wanted to start hunting. "We had it cut down to fit a young person, and Violet is very comfortable with it," says O.W. "That rifle has been used by many a young person who was just starting. We loaned it out many, many times."

While Violet has taken three deer in three years, she says the excitement of the hunt does not come from the kill. "I just don't get excited by it," she says. "I watch hunting shows on TV and someone shoots a deer and they're jumping up and down with excitement, but that doesn't happen for me. I like to eat venison. I think it's good for you, a good source of protein, so I'm thankful when I take a deer. But I enjoy being out there by myself. I see all kinds of things: foxes, squirrels, birds. I love the birds. One day I heard all this noise behind my stand and it was several deer just a few feet away. One was right at the door. If I'd shot it I wouldn't have been able to get out."

With the new season approaching, Violet had a decision to make. Would she stick with O.W.'s custom-made deer stands, or would she try out the new, lightweight pop-up? Violet set up the pop-up in the backyard and took a little teasing about having just stepped out of the Cabela's catalog, but she clearly liked the ease with which the stand could be moved and set up. The deer season is long in eastern Virginia, and there is plenty of time to try all sorts of options. Which stand would Violet use this year? "All of them," she replied with a laugh. □

Curtis Badger, whose most recent book is A Natural History of Quiet Waters (UVA Press), has written widely about natural history and wildlife art. He lives on Virginia's Eastern Shore.

Wrobleck's Huntin' House





Hunters, hound dogs, and a cabin provided a youngster with an education to last a lifetime.

by Wayne C. Turner



©Dwight Dyke

From Richmond, Virginia head east until the air gets thick and humid and smells of salt and marsh; you're getting close. When the tires quit whining on asphalt and start squish-squishing in sand, you're almost there. Stop, get out, and continue walking east. When you're about ankle deep in water, mud, and muck, go another few yards and you've arrived!

Welcome to Wroblick's Huntin' House. The men who hung around it and the hound dogs that were among my best friends all helped raise me in the swamps of eastern Virginia over 50 years ago. This is their and my story about deer hunting and kid raising.

We'd meet every hunt day long before daylight in the huntin' house. At one time, the house was white—I could tell from the bits of white paint stubbornly hanging onto the weathered bare siding. It was small, with one rather large room that was the gathering site for the day.

Close your eyes and walk with me into that room and let your smell and hearing guide the way. First, your nose picks up memory-generating scents of damp wool, wet dog fur, and gun cleaning solvent. Then, your hearing detects wind rattling around loose window panes, the wood stove sucking in air as it heats the house, coffee boiling on the wood stove, and men telling stories to each other.

Open your eyes and you'll see about 10 men sitting around and one sandy-haired kid curled around the wood stove (me). This was one of my favorite times of the day. Stories that everyone knows are only partially true are flying everywhere.

We hunted paper mill lands or local farms; but all of them contained significant swamps, and the difficulty of hunting in the ever-present marshes was our argument for using dogs to chase the deer out to where we could get to them. That practice and those packs of hounds define a whole culture that was extremely important to me then and still is to many. Today, I choose to hunt my deer with a recurve bow and black powder rifle, but I would fight to save that culture. Somewhere today, there's another huntin' house or two with kids in it that will become the next Archibald Rutledge, Havila Babcock, Sigurd Olsson, Adolph Leopold, or another of our outdoor, naturalist literature. Even Henry David Thoreau said the best way to raise a naturalist is to start him hunting and fishing.

That particular day we had cho-



©Dwight Dyke



The Wroblek family at the time consisted of (my best memory) a mother and father who came over from Poland and spoke only broken English and three sons: Steve, Joe, and John. Mom and Dad Wroblek made their living from vegetable farming, helping with the deer hunts, and by cleaning and repairing floating seine nets that were used in the spring to harvest spawning white and hickory shad and anadromous stripers. The sons, along with Dad and other locals, organized the hunts. The sons were John, often wearing riding pants and leather boots (above, right), Joe, who ran a local diner when he wasn't hunting (center, holding dog), and Steve (kneeling left between Joe and the deer). Steve and Dad worked at the local paper mill and were inseparable during hunting season.

sen to hunt Olsson's farm, so we loaded the dogs and drove to the site. We stopped and released about a dozen dogs. There were Walkers, Blue Ticks, Black and Tans, Red Bones, and about every combination or permutation thereof. Ancestral lineage was often determined by happenstance rather than by careful planning.

There'd be a three-legged dog in the bunch along with a one-eyed hound, and many of the dogs would carry other battle scars. Dogs would run around everywhere, emptying bladders and bowels. After the running around was over, I'd get on one knee, and the dogs—knowing this kid was good for an ear rub and maybe even a butt scratch—would come to me. They were among my best friends and they knew it.

We (people) would scatter around the farm on old roads. The farms might run from 100 acres to several thousand; this farm was very large. One driver would start the dogs. He would bellow in the swamp, sounding more like a dog than the dogs themselves, but it was easy to tell him from the rest by the skill with which he called out to the

dogs. Often, he directed his spirited remarks at individual dogs that didn't think running deer was the number one priority of the day.

Soon, several of the dogs would bark **cold trail**, which was a less than enthusiastic statement they had smelled a deer. Over the next 30 minutes to several hours, depending on scenting conditions and the IQ of the deer, that cold trail bark would turn into a **hot trail bark** which had more enthusiasm, like a verb finding its direct object; then, a **running bark** telling us the scent was fresh and they knew the deer was moving; and finally, a **running by sight bark**. This latter bark carried excitement and joy. There is no mistaking this one, as it sends chill bumps up the spine of all who hear it. The melody of a dozen hounds running a deer or coon by sight is one of the most thrilling sounds ever heard (read *Where the Red Fern Grows*). Yes, you can tell all those sounds after awhile and even which dogs are making them. That's an important part of the culture.

A deer running through the woods makes a noise that is very distinctive, even unmistakable. That day, I heard the deer coming toward



My father quit school when he was 12 years old to help support the family, as he was the eldest and this was the norm in Appalachia where he lived. He came out of Appalachia with traps on his shoulder, a gun under his arm, towing a floating seine (net). He never lost that thrill of the harvest or the psychological need to be out there. This was the mid-1930s and those were hard times. My brother was born in 1933 and I was born in 1942. We were very fortunate to have grown up in Mom and Dad's home, and we never once went to bed hungry.

In the picture, Dad is standing on the left of the deer, holding an antler (check out those brow tines). In the picture are my two grandfathers, standing on the far left (I think). Grandpa Connelly (my mother's side) always carried a lawn chair for deer drives, and he made a great wing bone turkey call. I'd pay a bunch of money for one of his calls today. Grandpa Turner shot a double barrel Davis that I still own. It now has a new stock (had to do it); but I don't use it, for old times' sake. I do fondle it periodically and always keep it cleaned and oiled.

me. Down on one knee to see under the trees better, I was looking hard for the deer but he ran on by me (probably heard my racing heart) down toward my father. Dad visibly stiffened, put his old square forearm Browning to his shoulder, and I saw smoke. A few seconds later, I heard the shot. Dad lowered the gun and walked into the woods; not many deer ever escaped if he shot.

Paying homage to the fallen animal is something I pride myself on today; but in those days, we'd gut the deer, put him in the truck and go do it again. At the end of the day, we'd go back to Wroblick's and skin him.

There was a skinning tree and a skinning shed for bad weather. The sidebars describe the hunting party, but don't hold me to accuracy as many years have passed. Of course, this part was very social, and the meat was shared among all parties. In the picture on page 14 are my father's father, my mother's father, the other men that helped raise me, Dad, a dog, and the deer. Of all my outdoor pictures, this is my favorite.

This is when I learned that hamburger or steak was once a living

brown-eyed creature and not something born in a plastic package at the grocery store. Because of this upbringing, I never was bothered with gore and blood.

We'd go home with our meat, put it in a freezer, eat supper, relive the day and I'd go to bed. Sometimes, it'd still be daylight, but most times I'd last until after supper and sunset. The next day, we'd do it again.

And that's the way it was at Wroblick's Huntin' House. □

Wayne Turner lives in Fairplay, Colorado, with his wife of 40 years and more shotguns and fly rods than any man should have. He was raised in the swamps of eastern Virginia by a dad who was of the old hunter-gatherer type. He had a storybook childhood, as this story attempts to convey. "Thanks Steve, John, Joe, Harry, Ken, Mom and, especially, Dad."

Editor's Note:

While we acknowledge that hunting with hounds has become a sensitive issue for many Virginians, this story captures an important piece of our collective hunting heritage. For this reason, we believe it's important to tell.



©Dwight Dyke



Upland Game Bird Trail

Perhaps no state in the country is more proud of its hunting traditions than Virginia, and no form of hunting in Virginia is more traditional than quail hunting. Native son and famous author Havilah Babcock often wrote about chasing the "Prince of Game Birds" when he was a youngster, through the fields of Appomattox. It is no secret that *Colinus virginianus*, more commonly known as the bobwhite or quail, has had a tough go of it lately. Tales told by our grandfathers of staunch alabaster pointers and setters standing firm on point in some bean field or thicket seem like ancient history to some of us. However, the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries has been diligent in its efforts to bring back the quail population. It also has been helpful in showing quail hunters where in Virginia they can still step back into time.

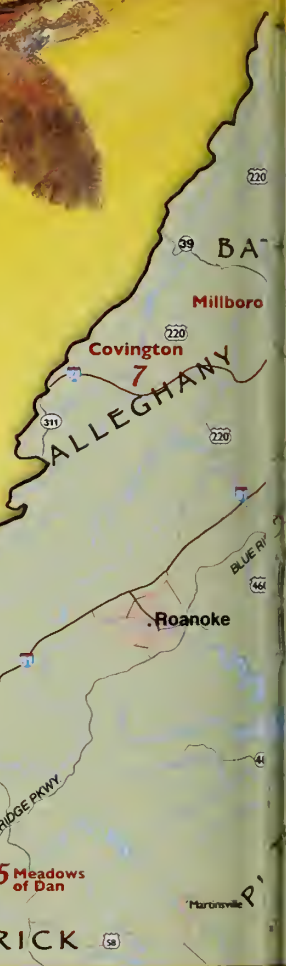
Virginia is fortunate to have many private hunting preserves throughout the state that offer a chance to hunt "the way it used to be." Preserves also take the pressure off natural quail and can act as an excellent training ground for a young pup. Most hunters agree that a bird dog learns much faster when it has the opportunity to see a large number of coveys. The preserves are strategically placed so one can

take a son or daughter hunting and also take advantage of other points of interest along the scenic byways of our state. One could, on a crisp fall morning, enjoy an early morning pheasant hunt and tour the wine country of the Blue Ridge the same afternoon. You can have your dogs pointing quail, then take the family to relive the history of Williamsburg and Jamestown during the same weekend. There are a number of hunting preserves near such noteworthy venues as Monticello, Montpelier, the Homestead, Lexington, and Charlottesville.

Virginia's hunting preserves offer a variety of opportunities and services for the sports-minded. Your family can hunt at preserves offering additional resort-like amenities such as tennis courts, skeet and sporting clay ranges, golf courses, fishing spots, and fine dining. Some locations may provide overnight accommodations and others, just the basic no-frills hunt. Several preserves offer the outdoors person a chance to hunt birds not usually found in Virginia, such as pheasant and chukar.

Finding a good hunting preserve in Virginia is like discovering a good Virginia wine—you don't have to pay a fortune to enjoy one. The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries can help you research the kind of hunt you want to experience. Whichever type of preserve you choose, a good preserve should offer strong flying birds at a reasonable price. ■

©Illustration by Spike Knuth



Hunting Preserves

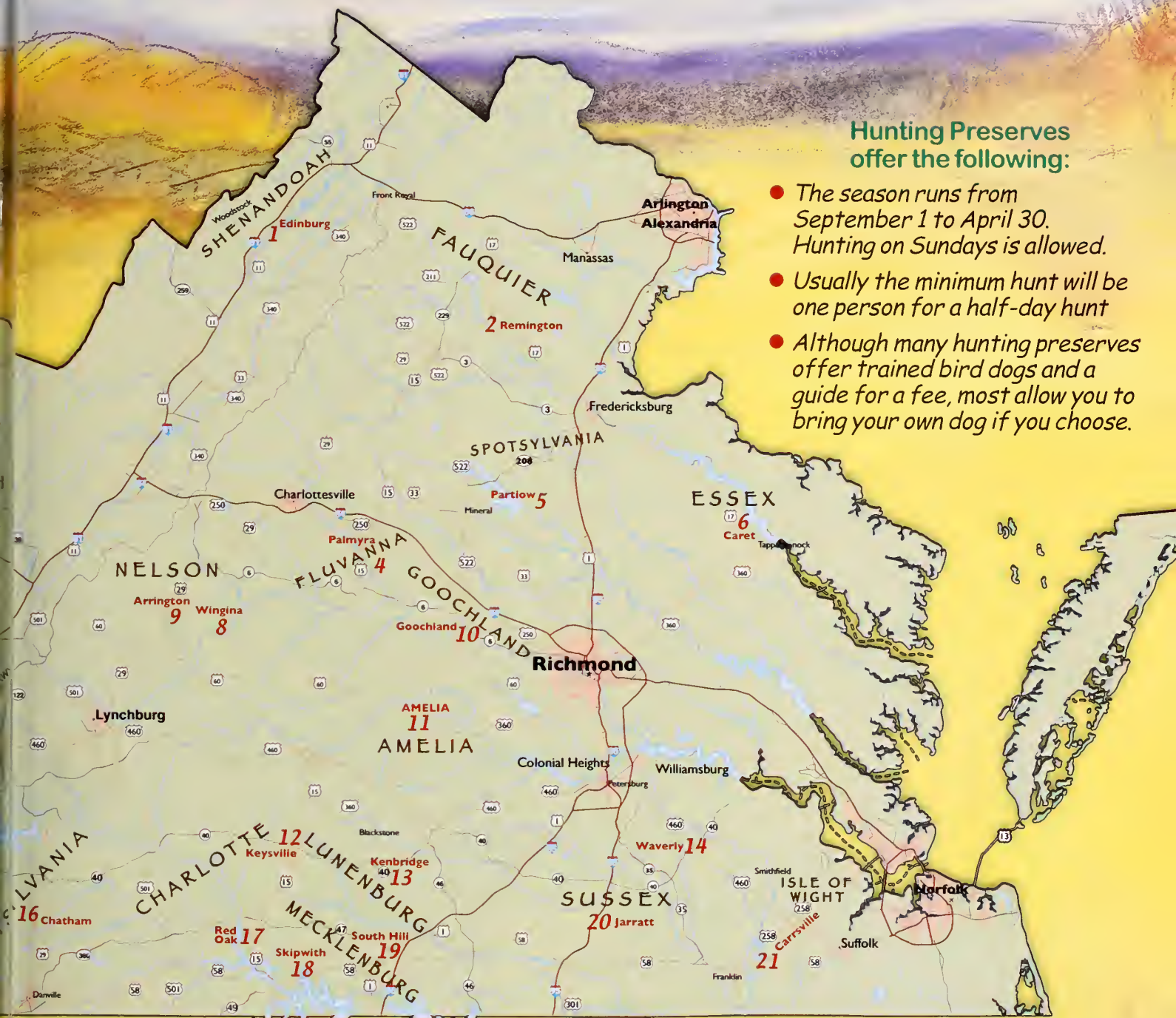
- 1** Shenandoah
Falls Run Farm and Shooting Preserve
- 2** Fauquier
Shady Grove Kennel and Hunting Preserve, Inc.
- 3** Bath
Hunters Paradise Hunting Preserve
- 4** Fluvanna
Winter Haven Game Farm and Preserve

- 5** Spotsylvania
Forest Green Shooting Preserve
- 6** Essex
Blandfield Lodge
- 7** Alleghany
Mountain View Wingshooting, Inc.
- 8** Nelson
The Orion Estate

- 9** Nelson
Oak Ridge Game Preserve
- 10** Goochland
Orapax Plantation
- 11** Amelia
Sleepy Oaks Farm
- 12** Charlotte
Feathers-Fur & Fin Kennel

Hunting Preserves offer the following:

- The season runs from September 1 to April 30. Hunting on Sundays is allowed.
- Usually the minimum hunt will be one person for a half-day hunt
- Although many hunting preserves offer trained bird dogs and a guide for a fee, most allow you to bring your own dog if you choose.



Preserves in Virginia

13 Lunenburg
Bacon's Bird Preserve

14 Sussex
Sussex Shooting Sports

15 Patrick
Primland Resort

16 Pittsylvania
White Oak Mountain Hunting Lodge

17 Charlotte
Sandy Creek Shooting Preserve

18 Mecklenburg
White Oaks Hunting Preserve and Shooting Sports

19 Mecklenburg
South Bound Sporting Preserve

20 Sussex
Hunts Game/Training Preserve

21 Isle of Wight
Sportsman Hunting Preserve

Hunting Preserves in Virginia

Alleghany

Mountain View Wingshooting, Inc.
4601 Hayes Gap Road
Covington, VA 24426
www.mtnviewwingshooting.com
E-mail: Wingshooter@mtviewwingshoot-
ing.com
(540) 691-5155
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant,
Hungarian partridge

Amelia

Sleepy Oaks Farm
13111 Reed Rock Road
Amelia Court House, VA 23002
sleepyoaks-farm.com
E-mail: contactus@sleepyoaks-farm.com
(804) 561-4764
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant

Bath

Hunters Paradise Hunting Preserve
6760 Deerfield Road
Millboro, VA 24460
(540) 996-4134 or (540) 969-6561
www.greenvalleyhuntersparadise.com
E-Mail: huntersparadise@tds.net
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant,
Hungarian partridge

Charlotte

Sandy Creek Shooting Preserve
205 Sportsman Lane
Red Oak, VA 23964
(434) 735-8669
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant

Feathers-Fur & Fin Kennels Hunting Preserve

1975 Highway 59
Keysville, VA 23947
(800) 643-2606
E-mail: fffkennels@pure.net
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant

Essex

Blandfield Lodge
10001 Patterson Ave, Suite 100
Richmond, VA 23238
Quail Hunts: (540) 229-8045
Waterfowl Hunts: (804) 731-3562
www.blandfieldplantation.com
Bobwhite quail, ringneck pheasant

Fauquier

Shady Grove Kennel and Hunting Preserve, Inc.
11986 Lucky Hill Road
Remington, VA 22734
(540) 439-2683
www.shady-grove.com
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant,
Hungarian partridge, dove

Fluvanna

Winter Haven Game Farm and Preserve
1420 Indiana Avenue
Woodbridge, VA 22191
30 Miles South West of High Point Marina,
Lake Anna
Day: (703) 725-7926
Evening: (703) 494-2081
www.winterhavenpreserve.com
E-mail: winterhngmfmpsv@aol.com
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant

Goochland

Orapax Plantation
3831 River Road West
Goochland, VA 23063
(804) 556-2261 or (804) 556-6585
www.orapax.com
E-mail: contact@orapax.com
Bobwhite quail, ringneck pheasant

Isle of Wight

Sportsman Hunting Preserve
30304 Outland Drive
Carrsville, VA 23315
(757) 620-4184
www.sportsmanshuntingpreserve.com
E-mail: sportsmanship@aol.com
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant

Lunenburg

Bacon's Bird Preserve
2978 Bacon Fork Rd.
Kenbridge, VA 23944
(434) 676-3859
E-mail: baconfw@longwood.edu
Bobwhite quail

Mecklenburg

White Oaks Hunting Preserve and Shooting Sports
18014 Highway 49 North
Skipwith, VA 23968
(434) 374-2025
www.whiteoaks.ws
E-mail: andrewjones@whiteoaks.ws
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant,
Hungarian partridge

South Bound Sporting Preserve

1029 Drycreek Road
South Hill, VA 23970
(434) 447-8363
www.southboundpreserve.com
E-mail: quail@southboundpreserve.com
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant

Nelson

Oak Ridge Game Preserve
2300 Oak Ridge Road
Arrington, VA 22922
(434) 263-6695
www.oakridgeestate.com
E-mail: info@oakridgeestate.com
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant

The Orion Estate

P. O. Box 8027
Charlottesville, VA 22906
www.OrionEstate.com
E-mail: info@OrionEstate.com
(434) 263-6622
Bobwhite quail, ringneck pheasant

Patrick

Primland Resort
4621 Busted Rock Road
Meadows of Dan, VA 24120
(866) 960-7746 or (276) 222-3800
www.primland.com
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant,
Hungarian partridge

Pittsylvania

White Oak Mountain Hunting Lodge
455 East Store Lane
Chatham, VA 24531
Toll free (888) 432-4868
www.whiteoakbirdhunt.com
E-mail: revrusty@gamewood.net
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant,
Hungarian partridge

Shenandoah

Falls Run Farm and Shooting Preserve
471 Bowers Lane
Edinburg, VA 22824
(540) 325-3180
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant,
Hungarian partridge

Spotsylvania

Forest Green Shooting Preserve
P.O. Box 38
Partlow, VA 22534
(540) 582-2566
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant

Sussex

Hunts Game/Training Preserve
5142 Hunt Road
Jarratt, VA 23867
(804) 691-8809
huntsgamepreserve.com
E-mail: clint@huntsgamepreserve.com
Bobwhite quail, chukar, ringneck pheasant

Sussex Shooting Sports

570 Southpark Blvd.
Colonial Heights, VA 23834
(804) 834-3801
dancesportinggoods.net
E-mail: dancesportinggoods@yahoo.com
Bobwhite quail, ringneck pheasant

(Introduction by Clarke C. Jones)



The Fish Ducks

story and illustrations
by Spike Knuth

Flying with fast-whirring wings in straight-away flight, they often make wide, sweeping turns. In flight their heads are compressed, looking very narrow with their stick-like bill. They inhabit the swamps, wooded marshes, tree-edged ponds and lakes, river mouths into the salty waters of the Chesapeake, and the big tidal rivers where water turns fresh. They are the mergansers, often called fish ducks or sawbills.



Hooded Merganser

Be Wild! Live Wild! Grow Wild!



Hooded Merganser

Virginia has three kinds of mergansers: the hooded, which is the smallest; the red-breasted, which is medium sized; and the common, or American, which is the largest. Mergansers have narrow, cylindrical bills that have fine serrated or sawtooth edges that angle backward, giving rise to the nickname, "sawbill," or "bec scie," as it is known in Cajun Louisiana. Toothy edges enable them

to catch and grasp slippery fish—their main diet and the reason they are referred to as fish ducks.

These birds are excellent swimmers and divers and very quick underwater. They literally fly through the water using their wings as well as their feet. They are also skittish when you come near them on the water, and must run for a short distance to get airborne. Conversely, they are not

very mobile on land. With legs and feet set far back on their bodies, they often teeter onto their breast, and have to push themselves forward on land with feet kicking in a half walk, half push method.

Other than size and of course colors and markings, the three merganser types are somewhat separated by their favored habitat. Hooded mergansers tend to like swampy or tree-edged marshes, lakes and ponds, although you will see them in open water or backwater sloughs of tidal rivers, but mainly in fresh or brackish waters. Red-breasted mergansers have a definite affinity for saltier waters and



Red breasted Merganser

are common off the ocean coasts in winter, but will come into the bigger rivers and river mouths. You can often see them off the Chesapeake Bay Bridge-Tunnel or at Kiptopeke State Park on the Eastern Shore. Common mergansers seem to prefer the big open water of tidal rivers farther inland where the water is fresh. In fact, in some years only a few of them venture this far south.

Hooded Merganser

(*Lophodytes cucullatus*)

The hooded merganser is the smallest of the three and the most common wintering merganser in Virginia. It enjoys a host of colorful local names, including swamp sheldrake, tree sawbill, fan-crested duck, water pheasant, pheasant duck, round-crested duck, fuzzy head, hairy headed teal, shagpoll, and cottonhead. This bird prefers the timbered waters, slow-moving rivers, quiet swamps, calm ponds, marsh sloughs, and lake

coves in different habitats, including fresh, brackish, and saltwater areas. Look for them in the salt marshes of the Eastern Shore, where they are quite common.

Hooded mergansers are about 17 to 18 inches long and weigh about 1½ pounds. The male hooded is black above and white below, with light,

rufous-brown sides, finely waved with dark brown or black. It has two black hash marks on its forward sides. Its most outstanding feature is its semi-circular white crest, edged in black, which can be opened and closed like a fan. These are especially noticeable during spring courtship, when opened and depressed to impress a female.

In flight, the crest is depressed into a narrow white line behind the eye, head narrowed, and carried maybe even a little below body level. Sometimes its rapidly beating wings emit a quiet whistling sound. Both sexes show a lot of flashing white



Red-breasted Merganser



Red-breasted Merganser

from their wing speculums. The female is basically brownish-gray with a brown head and a fuzzy, cinnamon-tinted crest.

Hooded mergansers are wary and alert, usually found in pairs or small flocks of 5 to 8 birds. In winter the whole group may be all males but, as spring approaches, 1 or 2 females may join them. They swim about buoyantly, sometimes forming a feeding line as they dive almost in unison for small fish and other aquatic critters. They will land with a big, sliding splash and swim inshore to feed. When startled, they reverse the process, swimming outward before taking flight. The hooded merganser requires a short runway and gets into flight quickly by running.

The hooded merganser breeds mainly in forested regions of eastern Canada and the northeastern United States. Although a few breed in the south Atlantic, they generally nest farther north. They begin moving north about mid-February, even before most of the ice breaks up on lakes and rivers. Main flights take place in March and early April. They again orient to the wooded swamps or

forests near water and nest in tree cavities or rotting snags, much like the wood duck.

In Virginia, look for hooded mergansers on the York River and along the Colonial Parkway, as well as the Potomac, Rappahannock, Mattaponi, Pamunkey, and Piankatank rivers. You may also see them in the Hog Island Wildlife Management Area, and any wooded lakes like Briery Creek, Chickahominy Reservoir, and numerous inland lakes and out-of-the-way swamps.

Red-breasted Merganser

(*Mergus serrator*)

The red-breasted merganser is a little larger than the hooded, with a longer neck, head, and bill. It shows a lot of white on its wings in flight. The adult male has a double-crested, metallic-green head, a red bill, a white neck collar, and a reddish-brown breast marked with black and white, white flanks, and a dark back. The hen is dressed in browns and grays. She has a double-crested, reddish-brown

head blending to a white chin and throat. This merganser has a red bill and feet.

These mergansers favor salt water and most are seen on the ocean. They are fairly abundant in the bays and estuaries of the seaside Eastern Shore throughout the winter months. However, many will come up the big tidal rivers: the lower York, Potomac, Rappahannock, and Piankatank, or spend time in brackish marshes and bays. Most of them travel farther south to winter off Florida. I recall one year seeing a flock of what must have been 2 or 3 thousand, wintering in the Gulf of Mexico off Destin, Florida. They fly low over the water, often in a line, but sometimes in undisciplined bunches. When on migration, they fly at greater heights.

Many red-breasted mergansers stage in the Chesapeake Bay in Virginia in February and March, where good numbers can be seen from the Bay Bridge-Tunnel. Most will head north in March and April. They generally nest farther north than other mergansers, near freshwater lakes or



Common Merganser



Common Merganser

rivers, in upturned tree roots or driftwood, or overhanging shoreline vegetation. They are at home in moving water and frequently feed in fast-moving rivers.

Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*)

The common, or American, merganser is the largest of our mergansers and routinely winters in the north around the New England coasts, the upper Mississippi Valley, and the Great Lakes. It, too, likes to feed in fast-flowing waters, especially in dam tailraces and below rapids and waterfalls, probably because fish are also drawn to these places to feed on aquatic insects, and smaller fish are swept into these areas. Common mergansers resemble the cormorant when feeding and resemble the loon in flight.

Also known as the gossander or sheldrake, common mergansers measure up to 27 inches and weigh 3 pounds. Their size makes taking off a little more difficult, and they need a good run to get airborne. Sometimes they'll use a fast current to help them get up to speed.

The male is basically black and white above, with black wings and white speculums. Its underside is white, with a light buffy or rusty stained area down the center of its breast and belly. Its blackish head shines a dark, glossy green when the light hits it right, which contrasts with its carmine red bill and feet. The female is gray above and white below, with white wing speculums and a reddish-brown head that has a well-defined white chin and throat.

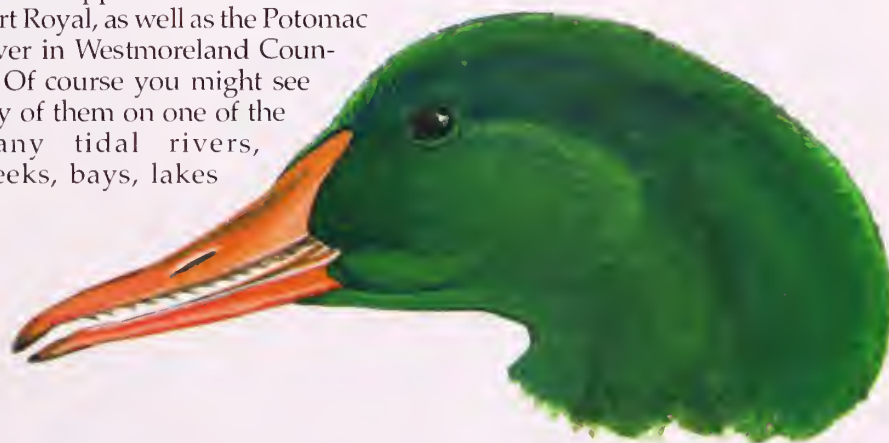
The common merganser breeds along our northern tier of states and in Canada, from coast to coast, nesting in hollow trees, rock crevices on the ground, under drooping vegetation, and sometimes in old buildings.

In Virginia, common mergansers may be found in the upper portions of the Rappahannock River around Port Royal, as well as the Potomac River in Westmoreland County. Of course you might see any of them on one of the many tidal rivers, creeks, bays, lakes

and ponds throughout the Northern Neck and the Middle Peninsula, from November to April. □

Spike Knuth is an avid naturalist and wildlife artist. For over 30 years his artwork and writing have appeared in Virginia Wildlife. Spike is also a member of the Virginia Outdoor Writers Association.

Be Wild! Live Wild! Grow Wild! is a regular feature that highlights Virginia's Wildlife Action Plan, which is designed to unite natural resources agencies, sportsmen and women, conservationists and citizens in a common vision for the conservation of the Commonwealth's wildlife and habitats in which they live. To learn more or to become involved with this new program visit: bewildvirginia.org.



Rivers Edge Elementary School is going green!

story and photos by Gail Brown

Trying to find out who started recycling at Rivers Edge Elementary School (REES) is more fun than asking "Who's on first?" No matter who you talk to, you wind up with "I don't know!" Perhaps it's serendipity, but the kids, the staff, and the PTA all seemed to have had the same idea at the same time: Let's recycle at Rivers Edge.

While great ideas originate from many sources, once in place they're like flashers at a worksite. The entire community is alerted: Slow down—construction ahead! What's being built at Rivers Edge, an exemplary Virginia Naturally school program in Henrico County, reflects the values the community believes important, and sparks are flying everywhere.

Special programs require muscle as well as materials. At Rivers Edge the PTA and Student Council Association (SCA) work together to provide the resources needed to support their recycling efforts. While the SCA purchased a recycling bin for each classroom, the PTA pays for the recycling service. Last year, recyclables were picked up bi-monthly; happily, efforts now require weekly pick-ups. The muscle comes from the kids (all 637 of them), the PTA "Go Green" team, and staff members like REES' counselor, Anne Game, and physical education teacher, Rhett Rutman. Each Friday morning Game and Rutman are available to help the kids unload their recycle bins and to thank everyone for doing their part.

"Students on the 'Go Green' team pick a different friend to help each week," stated Game, "with the goal being that all students will have an opportunity to empty the class re-

Above: More in the bin means less in the landfill. **Below:** Reduce, reuse, recycle—and no littering!



Above: Time outside is always fun.

Green Team

cycling bin. Our students are excited to help the environment."

Principal Johnna Riley is as proud of the environmental leadership role REES is taking as she is excited about the methods used to craft their message, a message made clear during last year's field day. "Our PE teacher, Mr. Rutman, planned our annual field day to reflect our recycling theme. We had a 'Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle' field day ... and partnered with the Keep Henrico Beautiful program (KHB) to plan the day. Students had so much fun kicking balls made of trash inside plastic bags and crawling through obstacle courses made from cardboard boxes. It was a great culminating activity for a year of 'Go Green' efforts."

Then there's all that fun to be had on "paperless day," a once-a-month dream come true for kids of all ages. On paperless day, teachers provide hands-on lessons only, and students

learn using a variety of different materials—but no paper and pencils allowed! In addition to making learning exciting, paperless days have made everyone aware just how much paper is used daily (approximately 3,000 sheets!) and, conversely, how much can be saved with a little effort.

According to Game, plans include building on the programs already in place, investigating other initiatives, and forming a student-led "Go Green" team. While their partnership with the Keep Henrico Beautiful program continues to grow, other partnerships will be sought as more opportunities present themselves. All signs point to a future that's great and green at Rivers Edge. But, then, everybody knows that. □

Gail Brown is a retired principal for Chesterfield County Public Schools. She is a lifelong learner and educator, and her teaching and administrative experiences in grades K-12 have taught her that project-based environmental programs teach science standards, promote core values, and provide exciting educational experiences for the entire community.



Above: It's pumpkins and markers this Paperless Day! **Below:** Our memories of Field Day 2008.



Above: What can I make with just straws and string?



We Are



Our roots spring from the Appalachian mountain ranges of far Southwest Virginia—the land of our childhood. We have traveled extensively and could have built our retirement home in any of the places we visited. But because our hearts belonged to the mountains, to the hollers, and to the people of this isolated area, we made Long Ridge in Dickenson County our home, close to the counties of our beginnings. Our house is perched on property where Wayne's great grandfather and great grandmother are buried, something we did not know until we had decided to buy.

We endeavor to be in harmony with the mountains and the wildlife that frequent this area. The view allows for a panorama of several mountain ranges but few valleys, and we can see Kentucky, West Virginia, and Tennessee from our deck. Strip mines near our property have been reclaimed, providing habitat and food for turkey and deer.

In May we look forward to the arrival of hummingbirds and tree swallows. We feed the hummers continually until they depart for warmer climates around September and feed other, smaller birds throughout the year, especially on snowy days. Deer glean the apples from our small orchard of 150 or so trees, and many birds enjoy the last of the unpicked cherries.

Wayne has fond childhood memories of hunting and fishing and camping with his uncles. In retirement, he again hunts deer and fishes the rivers and streams nearby. Fresh and preserved vegetables from the garden were so much a part of our youth. And that tradition continues.

This land is the place we had yearned to be. We are home. □



Home

essay by Genevie Riner
photos by Wayne Riner



Above: Princess and White Face are walking to the pond for water and stop to watch me, wondering if I am bringing them something to eat.

Left: Beavers sleep during a late February day in their lodge, covered by a light blanket of snow.

Right: Eyes that are well camouflaged against bare trees watch us as we walk the high ridges of the winter woods.





Journal

2009 Outdoor Calendar of Events



by Beth Hester

Unless otherwise noted, for current information and registration on workshops go to the "Upcoming Events" page on the Department's Web site at www.HuntFishVA.com or call 804-367-7800.

February 7: *Learn the Basics of Flyfishing*, Northwest River Park, Chesapeake. Free and open to public. For more information contact Bill Wills Tu/FFF at 757-421-7151 or tu389bwills@cox.net.

February 13-16: 2009 Great Backyard Bird Count. www.audubon.org/gbbc or www.birdsource.org/gbbc

February 14: Grouse season closes.

February 28: Rabbit season closes.

March 7: *Learn the Basics of Flyfishing*, Northwest River Park, Chesapeake. Free and open to public. For more information contact Bill Wills Tu/FFF at 757-421-7151 or tu389bwills@cox.net.

April 4: Trout Heritage Day

April 4: Kids Fishing Heritage Day, Graves Mountain Lodge. Starts 9:00 a.m. For more information, call 540-923-4231.

April 4: Youth Spring Turkey Hunt Day. For ages 15 and younger.

April 11: Spring Turkey season opens.

May 15-17: *Becoming an Outdoors-Woman®*, Holiday Lake 4-H Center, Appomattox. Ages 18 and up. ☐

The Ultimate Guide to Wilderness Living: Surviving With Nothing But Your Bare Hands and What You Find In the Woods

by John and Geri McPherson
Illustrated with black and white photographs
2008 Ulysses Press
www.ulyssespress.com
Phone: 510-601-8301

"John and Geri are the real deal. They don't just teach this stuff, they live it ... I can sit back and watch my shows and see John and Geri's teachings peek through in every situation."

— Les Stroud,
AKA 'Survivorman'

How many of us have daydreamed about running away from home to build a life in the wilderness? More recently, how many of us perched nervously on the edge of our seats, cheering on Tom Hanks as he struggled to build a fire in the movie *Cast Away*? Survival is our most primal urge, and when harnessed correctly, it can bring out the most resilient and creative aspects of our selves.

John and Geri McPherson know this, and they teach wilderness living and survival skills to the instructors of the U.S. Army Special Warfare Command's S.E.R.E Survival School.

With an expertise sharpened by years of field experience, they've built a satisfying, sinewy life for themselves on the homestead they established in 1978; there is no electricity, and their homemade water system is gravity fed.

The McPhersons' most recent guide isn't a rudimentary textbook for wilderness survival; it's more a step-by-step celebration of ancient Stone Age skills: making cordage, creating semi-permanent shelters, firing pottery, tanning buckskin, and trapping food. Once these advanced techniques are mastered, they boost the bare-bones 'how-to-survive-in-the-woods' fundamentals that many of us learned as boy or girl scouts—skills that transform sheer survival into an adequate existence. Each chapter is illustrated with ample black and white how-to photographs; their quality varies, but they sufficiently serve to reinforce the text.

Though the authors were not focused on mimicking any particular folkway, a collateral benefit of this book is the anthropological satisfaction gained from learning to replicate the life-skills of our ancient ancestors. We are shown how to create fish traps for ponds, creeks and rivers, build basic buckskin smokers, manufacture wilderness containers, and craft primitive bows and arrows. A section devoted to capturing and eating a variety of ... ahem ... 'small game' contains an amusing, but important sidebar concerning rodent awareness and the dreaded Hantavirus. John and Geri literally leave no stone unturned.

The deceptively breezy narrative style belies the practical underpinnings of the hard-core instruction contained within. A great read for the Robinson Crusoe in all of us. ☐

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Outdoor Writers to Meet in Hampton

Hampton on the shores of the Chesapeake Bay is the site chosen for the jointly hosted meeting of the Mason-Dixon (M-DOWA) and Virginia (VOWA) outdoor writers associations, March 20-22, 2009 at the Crowne Plaza Hampton Marina Hotel.

The conference begins Friday afternoon with a harbor cruise or something equally fun planned, sponsored by the Hampton Convention & Visitors Bureau. Dinner may be sponsored as well; if not, it is dutch treat. The hotel has several good restaurants and many good eateries are within walking distance.

Saturday morning begins with breakfast. Planned presentations include digital photography, Photoshop, and editorial tips of the trade.

The M-DOWA working lunch will include a program, while a separate lunch will accommodate the VOWA annual meeting. Presentation of awards recognizing winners in the youth writing, undergraduate writing, and the association's excellence-in-craft competition will also be made.

During the evening, a cocktail hour will be followed by Mason Dixon's Dominion-sponsored annual awards banquet. Virginia Governor Tim Kaine has been invited as the keynote speaker. He is an avid sportsman.

If you have questions or need more information, please contact King Montgomery at 703-425-0849, or kingmontgo@aol.com. And check out www.visithampton.com and www.crowneplaza.com. □

CPOs Run 10K for Cancer Research

by Marika Byrd

Now's the time to start training for the Ukrop's Monument Avenue 10K run, scheduled for March 28, 2009. Mark your calendar and volunteer to run, assist at a water station, or cheer on your favorite athletes as they run to help fund research and find a cure for cancer. You'll be in good company.

Last year, 19 Conservation Police Officer trainees from the 4th Basic Law Enforcement Academy at the DGIF along with other employees participated in the event which benefits VCU's Massey Cancer Center (a charitable partner). That race saw 24,000 entrants, including 1,891 young runners ages 6 through 12 in the inaugural "First Market Mile Kids Run," finish the race. All DGIF runners finished in under one hour.

Major Steve Pike, Assistant Chief of the Law Enforcement Division at the Department and a race participant, emphasizes the necessity for trainees to be "fit for duty" during classroom education. The program includes a requirement for running three times weekly and swimming to stay physically fit and able to defend oneself, fellow officers, and the public at large from offenders, including violent ones. The Ukrop's 10K is the only annually organized race in which each academy class participates. In addition to keeping fit, it offers trainees an opportunity to give back to the community.

Tony McFadden, president of the 2008 DGIF Conservation Officers class, said he was nervous at first and did not know if he could make it that far. McFadden has since made contact with a judge back in the Lexington area to run together for health purposes.

Jessica Whorley, of the same class, said she thought it would be harder than it was. "After the academy training, I was ready for it." She felt she did a good job.

The message to the public is that you *reconsider* trying to outrun a Conservation Police Officer! They train

right, run well, and stay fit for life. For event information, go to the Richmond Sports Backers Web site at www.sportsbackers.org. □



Kid's Fishing Day April 4, 2009

by Marcia Woolman

Finally, a Kid's Fishing Day that offers things for the entire family! Yes, the fish will be stocked by DGIF for "Heritage Day" on the Rose River at Graves Mountain Lodge, and it will be only kids 12 and under who can fish all day. But the fun does not end there. Graves Mountain Lodge will have over 50 nice prizes for drawings all throughout the day and a gift for every youngster who registers. There will be many exhibits, including snakes and raptors and hay rides to see farm animals, and excellent food will be served in the covered pavilion.

Trout Unlimited will be there with volunteers to provide help with the kids fishing. The entire family, especially older children, can join in fishing classes on the pond and a casting demonstration and talk by Harry Murray, one of Virginia's renowned fly fishermen. Fly tying will be offered for kids and adults, so you can try your hand at tying your own first fly. Or you can just watch a tying demo by one of our experts. A team of stream monitors will bring up the bugs that trout eat, so you can learn about them too. For the adults, there will be a fly casting contest.

Wildlife exhibits, information booths, and enough to keep the whole family entertained for the entire day! Starts at 9 AM. Come early, stay late. □



CPO of the Year

We are very pleased to announce that Senior Officer Gregory Funkhouser has been named the 2008 Conservation Police Officer of the Year!

A 10-year veteran with the Department, Funkhouser began work in Roanoke County and also handled responsibilities for Salem and Roanoke cities. This year, he added coverage of Craig County to his territory.

Over the years, Funkhouser has made training and education an integral part of his career path. As a certified Dept. of Criminal Justice Services instructor, he has been actively involved in the Department's CPO Training Academy. Funkhouser is certified as both a Boating Safety and a Personal Watercraft Safety instructor, and serves as the Field Training Officer for new CPOs. He serves with a specially trained group of officers who instruct CPO recruits as well as conduct in-service training.

Officer Funkhouser is an extremely dedicated officer and educator and an exceptional public spokesperson for the Department, as evidenced by his record of reaching out to sportsmen's groups, civic organizations, and other citizens. His work ethic promotes the DGIF mission and enhances public knowledge of safety, game laws, and wildlife management.



Congratulations are due to Major Mike Clark, who recently joined the Richmond office after a long career in the Shenandoah Valley region. Clark has been with the Department for 30 years and has covered many assignments across the state. He was formally promoted to the rank of major in September. His new responsibilities will include managing the Law Enforcement Division's budget and training programs.



Find Game is an interactive Web-based map viewer designed by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to provide better and more current information about hunting land location and access in Virginia. *Find Game* allows users to map hunting areas by location and/or by game species, along with hunting quality by species, land manager contact information, site description, facilities available, access information and associated Web links.

To learn more about *Find Game*, visit www.HuntFishVA.com/hunting/findgame.

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by Ken and Maria Perrotte

Dining In

Northern Necker Duck Gumbo

Waterfowl recipes abound up and down the Eastern Seaboard and across the Gulf states.

Ducks and geese were dietary staples of early Virginians and much of the rest of the nation had a taste for ducks that market hunters did their best to satisfy. Beyond our own storied marshes, though, perhaps no state has achieved as much legendary duck hunting status as Louisiana.

Maria's father, Allen Johnness, was an avid duck hunter in his day, gunning the vast marshes south of New Orleans. She grew up enjoying many varied dinners featuring duck, but a Cajun-style duck gumbo was a real favorite.

"It makes a good gumbo" is a running punch line in Cajun Country for almost any critter considered a little unsavory on the taste buds. Coots, mergansers and a few other varieties of waterfowl come to mind. But, "good" ducks and a good roux make for good gumbo. Delicate-flavored teal, wood ducks, or even ringnecks match well with other ingredients in the recipe.

In this dish called "Northern Necker Duck Gumbo," she takes a bayou country favorite, adds a little Virginia venison sausage and Hog Island greenwing teal, and, well, "Laissez les bon temps roulez."

Northern Necker Duck Gumbo

- 2 large or 3 small wild ducks
- flour
- 2 tablespoons light oil (such as canola)
- ½ cup vegetable oil (traditionalists wanting old world flavor can use lard, butter or bacon fat)
- ½ cup flour
- 1 pound smoked sausage
- 2 cups chopped onion
- ½ cup chopped green pepper (optional)
- ½ cup chopped shallots
- 1 tablespoon minced garlic
- 2 tablespoons minced parsley
- 2 quarts cold water
- 2 teaspoons black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1 teaspoon thyme
- 2 bay leaves
- ½ teaspoon allspice

½ teaspoon cloves

3 tablespoons filé powder
salt and pepper to taste

Cut duck into quarters. De-bone the breasts, retaining the bones. Lightly coat meat in flour. Heat 2 tablespoons oil in a large heavy pot. Sear floured duck pieces in the oil until browned on all sides. Remove and set aside. In the same pot, add vegetable oil (or butter or lard), mix in the flour, and stir continuously over low heat until dark brown. (This will take 20 or 30 minutes and the roux should be the color of milk chocolate.) Add the sausage, onion, green pepper, shallots, garlic and parsley, and cook, stirring often, until vegetables are soft (about another 5 minutes). Add the duck meat and retained bones. Stir in half the water and all the seasonings except the filé powder. Mix in the rest of the water and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer the gumbo for about an hour or until the duck is tender, stirring frequently. Remove from heat. Remove the bones, add salt and pepper to taste, and add filé powder. Stir and serve over boiled long grain rice.

Notes:

* Roux is a staple for many French, Creole, and Cajun dishes. For those unfamiliar, a roux is simply equal parts of flour and oil (or butter) cooked slowly until brown. Some of the old Cajun roux masters would use duck fat in the recipe. To highlight the bold flavors of this duck gumbo, we like a dark roux, which tends to have a rich, nutty taste. Some recipes, particularly seafood gumbos, call for a lighter roux. Since you need to constantly stir the roux to prevent burning, it's smart to assemble all ingredients before you start cooking.

* Filé powder is made from sassafras and can be found in most supermarkets in the spice section.

* We use our homemade smoked venison sausage, but any commercial smoked sausage works well.

* A variation could be: adding a pint of oysters at the end of the cooking time and simmering for 5 minutes before thickening with filé.

* Pair with a nice pinot noir or syrah wine. Pinot noir is tough to grow in Virginia. Consider matching with a Horton Vineyards' 2002 Syrah, Rebec Vineyards' Pinot Noir, or Rapidan River Shiraz.

* Serve with green salad and crusty French or Italian bread.

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

Be A Deer and Be My Valentine!

A while ago I was talking with Helen Tripp of Richmond and she told me about a wonderful tradition that her family enjoyed. In the early '80s, when her girls were old enough to know about Valentine's Day, every February Helen would gather up her husband Guy's copies of *Virginia Wildlife* magazine, scissors, glue, and construction paper, and she and the girls would pile onto her bed to begin cutting and pasting hand-made valentines. As they hunted through copies of the magazines, photographs would spark ideas and sayings such as, "Be a deer and be my valentine," and, "It would be just ducky if you'd be my valentine," and, "I'm flying high when you're my valentine." As the girls cut and pasted, Helen would write their sayings on each card. How fun!



Helen's girls made some very creative and fun cards for Valentine's Day when they were young. The large card shown here was made by Laura just a few years ago. The tradition lives on! ©2009 Lynda Richardson

Although this happened twenty-plus years ago, Helen still has a few of those treasured valentines hidden away. When she offered to show them to me I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to share this idea with you, the readers of *Virginia Wildlife*. You too could start a family tradition of making your own valentine cards, or any cards for that matter. And if you don't want to cut up your magazines, why not use your own photographs?

Recent e-technology advances mean you can really have some fun with your family and this "cut-and-paste" idea. Photographs from magazines can still be cut and pasted into delightful cards, but now they can also be reproduced by way of scanners. You and the kids can make copies of favorite hand-made cards and send them to all of your family and friends! And, if you want to use your own photographs, software programs such as Adobe's PhotoShop (now available as version CS4) will allow you to cut and paste your pictures into cards, as well.

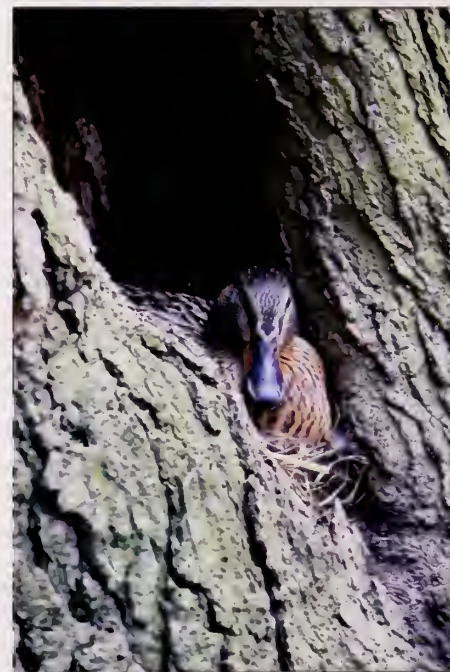
The Tripp family tradition of hand-made Valentine's Day cards has generated fond memories for Helen's daughters. Just a few years ago, eldest daughter Laura gave her mom a large, "traditionally made" valentine with a picture of a bear cub and hand-drawn hearts.

Why not gather your kids together this February and start your own card-making family tradition?

You are invited to submit one to five of your best photographs to "Image of the Month," *Virginia Wildlife* Magazine, P.O. Box 11104, 4010 West Broad Street, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. Send origi-

nal slides, super high-quality prints, or high-res 360 dpi jpeg files on disk and include a self-addressed, stamped envelope or other shipping method for return. Also, please include any pertinent information regarding how and where you captured the image and what camera and settings you used, along with your phone number. We look forward to seeing and sharing your work with the readers of *Virginia Wildlife*!

Image of the Month



Alan Pulley of Suffolk photographed this mallard hen sitting on her nest in the hollow of a tree near a small pond on his parents' property in Suffolk. Alan reports that the hen's nest was a few feet from the ground, and she was so well camouflaged that he almost missed seeing her. Good spotting! Canon EOS Digital Rebel XT*i*, Canon 85mm lens, ISO 200, 1/20th, f.5.6.

VIRGINIA WILDLIFE OUTDOOR CATALOG



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